PECKLESS RALPH'S NEW NOVER ROUND UP

OFFICIAL ORGAN HAPPY HOURS BROTHERHOOD

THE AUSTIN COLLECTION and EXHIBIT EXTRAORDINARY As told by Robert H. Smeltzer

I'll say that I experienced a great thrill; yes many of them upon the occasion of my first visit, accompanied by my brother, Edward, having received several kind invitations to come and "have a look."

First of all, my hat off to a "dime novel" brother who has added impetus to the game, and by his steady, earnest efforts has placed our favorites on a plane deserving of their merit. It is doubtful if any other collector has trailed down more types, especially those of the "rare" class. In doing so he has always been in a mood to distribute them among other collectors, thus vitalizing an enthusiasm amongst us that is conducive to growth and fraternalism all down the line.

Mr. Austin is that type of man, to meet every day. Unassuming in his manners, with a vast fund of information on novels and authors, their history from start to finish, which ne is very lavish in handing out, he too is very generous with helpful advice which is forever at his very fingertips. Generous too in a worldly sense as I am sure many of you readers know long 'ere this. He does not look upon his collection from a monetary standpoint alone. He worships his "hobby" as something closer to his heart. It has brought him profit, it is true, yet his eyes twinkle as he comments upon his close associations with everything pertaining to the game, quite so, and enthusiastically so, when it comes to the pleasant relations that have been his with so many other collectors of a like calibre

and inclination.

All this on top of the fact that he carries a weighty burden of responsibility incident to the operation of a successful confectionary store, which is modern in every respect. He truly is a Trojan for work, eats it up alive, to use a slang expression, and upon being queried, he remarked with a smile that he did not find his task an arduous or unpleasant one, after over forty years of expert candy-making. That alone is a record of achievement in itself. In the face of having lost a'plenty in his other investments. he looks upon "dime novels" as the best investment for his money and is very happy in having turned to them some years back.

I do not pose as a Walt Winchell, hence am not trying to make this an "interview" story. Mine host did the bulk of the talking while I was happy to be a deeply interested listener.

He is very proud of his collection, and has good reason to be so. It has been viewed by many "enthusiasts" and nary a one went away dissatisfied with the time so spent. It was a thrilling moment to hear him tell of the visit of the son of Colonel Prentiss Ingraham, laden down with mint copies of the rare old-timers running up into the thousands of dollars and his effecting a purchase of the whole shebang on a strictly cash basis. It gave him too, keen pleasure to chat a few moments upon a Philadelphia author who wrote many tales which appear in Beadle's Dime Library, by name Jesse C. Cowdrick, He resided in South Philadelphia and it was Mr. Austin's good fortune to know him personally. His description of Cowdrick was fine indeed.

With a ring of sadness mingled with delight he pictured his trip down New Jersey on a dime-novel hunt, locating a trunkful of the dandies in an old dilapidated barn; the sad part of the story was that a lot of rare ones were rat-chawed right through the center, remaining nothing but a lot of paper junk. However, the best part of his story is that he landed the balance for a mere ten spot, toting one-half home straight-away and returning the next day for the hefty balance. "That was a 'find' worth crowing about," chuckled our worthy novel sleuth.

In a second breath he will relate how he lost a lot of novels through his failure to make a deposit and clinch the deal. His offer was a cool \$1,000, but the novels never showed up. Later he was informed that they had been sold that very same day for \$1,500. The lot kept changing hands until they sold for \$3,500. Imagine his chagrin even to this day. This goes to show that there have been some mighty big-money deals in dime-novels. One might well label him "big-deal" Austin, for that appeals to him as affording him the biggest "kick."

Any interested customer is afforded the opportunity of walking to the rear of the store and viewing to his heart's content a very fine display of French's dime-novel cover photos; there must be thirty or more of them in a large frame, and do they make a "picture no artist can paint"? Likewise a number of original novels in frames which occupy all of the wall space in that corner.

All told, there are over two hundred pictures on the wall, pertaining to story-papers, dime-novels, clippings of the old pioneers, scouts and guides of the West, for instance Doc Carver (the Evil Spirit of the Plains) Powell, Buffalo Bill. There are too framed dime-novel articles; I recall three of Cummings and one of Charlie's.

The big "kick" awaits in the first floor hall and entry. Here again all the wall space is occupied with frames large and small; dime-novel originals vie with their neighbor story-paper and news-paper friends, not to forget some highly interesting photos of authors and celebrities and theatre programs of the long ago. One of these contained that famous pugilistic name of John L. Sullivan. There was limited time to see all of the collection, and so it was that in the hurry I failed to note the title of the play.

The ceiling is high, but that did not deter Mr. Austin from reaching the heights with his picture-frames. chuckled as he related one admirer asked for a step-ladder to climb up and get an honest-to-goodness eye-ful of a certain frame. There they set forth, mute evidence of all the glory of such as Star Journal, Beaus and Belles, Golden Days, Yankee Doodle (I believe that was the only colored-cover novel framed), Golden Argosy, Golden Hours, Harper's Weekly; a newspaper scene of the execution of the hanging of old John Brown, his own newspaper dime-novel article, hanging next to those of Ralph Cummings. The above are only a few of the frames, which number over two hundred. It will, however, give you a slight idea of the marvelous setting for those who come to view a remarkable display which I feel is second to none in the country.

Now for the dime novels, story-papers and other publications. A wonderful assortment of bound volumes, such as Boys of New York, Boys of England, Belles and Beaus, Flag of Our Union, Harper's Weeklies by the drove and last, but not least, a bound volume of "Pugilists of America," containing large handsome portraits and autobiographical data on the battles within the squared circle of some years back.

Mr. Austin's loose novels are kept in excellent order. Here is to be seen large tin-boxes piled high, one upon the other, excluding dust and any prowling mice and rats. His Beadles Dime Library and Beadle's Half Dime Library sets are the most numerous, running into the hundreds, with many duplicates, all in apple-pie shape. His leaning is toward the black and whites and the rare yellow backs and handpainted old-timers, and they surely are good for the eyes. Failing to notate the titles of such series I am unable to set them down now, but I was impressed with the magnitude of the lot taken as a whole.

These run into the money. Picking

up one lot Mr. Austin will state that he paid a five-spot for each and every one of them; in another instance, turning to one rare one he will point out that it cost him \$25.00. He also referred to a single item for which another collector is willing to pay \$100, and gladly too. So that is the way dime-novels have held their own, even through the depression years.

There are not only hand-painted novels, but also hand-painted song sheets, and they certainly are beautiful to behold, and valued at \$2 each. Too, must not forget to mention a nice run of old-time joke books with rarely colored covers,

I was impressed with the fact that he holds an extensive variety of Beadle's novels and publications of many kinds. Knowing what a rabid Beadle collector is Ralph Cummings who too possesses a Beadle collection of which to be proud, I am sure that he will now, more than ever before, yearn for the opportunity of gazing upon Mr. Austin's holdings of these fine items.

Arriving at about seven o'clock in the evening, when ten-fifteen rolled around, and it did so very quickly, mine host heaved a sigh for, said he: "We've not had the time and opportunity of looking over what I have upstairs."

Very interesting too were the contents of several boxes containing divers articles, such as the rare old-time colored advertising cards, almanacs, daguerreotypes, theatre programs (and each one indicates a play seen years ago), newspaper clippings of famous prize-fights going back to John L's day, and some of them yellowed from age.

What a "wow" of a collection; unique, to say the least. With a tinge of feeling in his voice, as though speaking of old friends, my good friend expressed the thought; "In the end, what will become of them all."

Additions (and where they come in). Addition No. 1. On page 2, where paragraph begins "The big kick" etc. OMIT: there was limited time to end of paragraph and ADD: The play was "Honest Hearts and Willing Hands," played at the old National Theatre, 10th & Callowhill Sts., Phila. where appeared many famous lights of the squared circle, for instance; Jeffries, Sharkey and Fitzsimmons appeared in-

dividually for three weeks straight, one following the other. I got a real thrill out of seeing Sharkey spar three short rounds with his colored sparring partner, Bob Armstrong. The main curtain went up, and behold a beautiful velvet curtain with the name of Tom Sharkey, the Sailor Boy. Little George Dixon and Terrible Terry McGovern too appeared there from time to time.

No. 2 Addition; Page 3 at end of 2nd paragraph which ends "taken as a whole." There lay before me "Schinderhonnes," a novel father has often talked to me about, and read in his youth. Schinderhonnes was the Great "Robin Hood," as I pointed out to Charlie.

Addition No. 3, page 1, end of par. 3, ending "inclination." I listened intently to what he had to relate of his knowledge of Jesse C. Cowdrick, famous author who starred so often in the Beadle Dime Library titles. Cowdrick lived in South Philadelphia and many's the time Charlie saw him, and can still recall him vividly. It made me smile when he informed me that he has no time for Gustave Aimard, (another Philadelphia author of note) as he never lived in the West of which he wrote. If I am not mistaken, this has been said of Ned Buntline, who turned out some cracker-jack tales of the old pioneer days.

(See Mr. Austin's Ad on back page),

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